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Coming To America

Quebec Spends the Summer Shooting in Chicago

For the last few years, summer in Chicago has meant several major motion pictures shooting in the area. This year, however, the only sizable film to take advantage of the warm weather was "Quebec," a feature-length comedy from Steve Conrad, the Chicago-based writer/director whose script for "The Weather Man" was filmed locally in 2004.

"Quebec" tells the story of an assistant manager at a local supermarket (played by Seann William Scott) that has his eyes on a promotion. The main character thinks his promotion is a sure thing until he encounters a rival from Quebec (played by John C. Reilly). The film hinges on the battle of wills that ensues between the two men.

Producer Jessika Borsiczky ("Revelations") said she became involved with the film after reading the script. After signing on as a producer, she succeeded in attaching Scott to the project, and started to pursue funding for the project, which came through the Weinstein Company's Dimension Films. Borsiczky said that while finding money for a project can be challenging, the script was so strong that it attracted a lot of attention.

The script also helped to attract department heads, including cinematographer Lawrence Sher ("Garden State") and production designer Martin Whist ("Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events"). "When we first met with them they immediately understood the tone of the film and [how to create] the world that Steve saw without making it overly fantastic," said Borsiczky.

On August 23, the crew of "Quebec" gathered on Chicago's South Side as part of an extended shoot at a recently closed Cub Foods store that served as the central location for the film. The early morning scenes involved Scott's character being hassled by a group of young thugs in the parking lot of the fictional Donaldson's grocery store.

Finding a location to serve as Donaldson's was one of the main challenges of "Quebec," said Borsiczky. "We considered shooting in a real grocery store and trying to shoot in off hours, but that became logistically impractical," she said. "Then we looked at warehouses that we would have to dress from scratch and that was economically impractical, so we started to look for shut down grocery stores that we could fill."

Steven A. Jones, a Chicago-based producer working on the film, said the search for suitable grocery stores proved challenging. He said the production was running out of

time to find a location when they heard about Cub Foods' plans to close several local stores.

The team from "Quebec" only had a week to close the deal with Cub, but when they did so, they had access to a fully functioning grocery store, complete with shelves and registers. A bevy of local companies lined up to donate products and fill the shelves, making Donaldson's look like a legitimate grocery store.

"Quebec" shot in its grocery store location for two weeks leading up to Labor Day. While there were a few issues with air conditioner noise, spoiled meat, and traffic inside the neighboring strip mall, Jones said there were a number of advantages to shooting in one location for an extended period of time. "If you go out on the [parking] lot and it starts raining, we can move [inside] and keep shooting," he said.

When they weren't shooting at the grocery store, Jones said the production set up shop at different locations across the city, including Hamlin Park, Beverly, Rogers Park, the Loop, the Museum Campus and several "L" trains. "It's an ambitious film for such a limited schedule," said Jones, noting that the budget for "Quebec" was in the $6 million range. "Each day, other than these couple of weeks in the store, we've been in a different location."

Shooting in Chicago added a lot to the film said Borsiczky, especially since "Quebec" is set here. "I'm not used to shooting the city I'm shooting in as the city I'm shooting in," she said. "It's a wonderful luxury to be able to just point your camera and absorb and apply everything that's in the shot."